

## STAFF ID



### Debby Briggs

Clinical Hematology Laboratory  
Hematology laboratory supervisor  
Years at Dana-Farber: 30

#### Describe your role here.

The Clinical Hematology Laboratory performs approximately 500 complete blood counts and white blood cell differentials each day, along with routine coagulation and urinalysis testing. We also process and do a preliminary differential

count on 15-20 bone marrows every day, along with performing special histochemical staining on the bone marrow sample to help differentiate the type of leukemia the patient has. Due to the nature of operating a clinical lab in an outpatient environment, we are essentially a STAT lab, performing the requested test as soon as it is received in the lab. We have worked hard to develop a streamlined system that allows us to turn around a test result in a timely manner, while still maintaining a high-quality product. I see my role as not only keeping the wheels on the bus moving day-to-day, but also trying to find ways to improve what we do and how we do it. I try to obtain the best technology available, and I'm always willing to work with other departments to improve how we do things.

#### What is your educational background?

I have a bachelor's degree in medical technology and a master's degree in biochemistry.

#### What brought you to Dana-Farber?

I got my undergraduate degree from what was then Southeastern Massachusetts University [now University of Massachusetts Dartmouth]. The women who ran the medical technology program knew the lab administrator and recommended me for an open position. I was fortunate to get a job in such a prestigious lab right out of school.

#### What is most rewarding about your work here?

It is nice that you can make a difference by what you do as a person and what you do with your life. I truly believe that what happens in this lab every day is important to the patients and providers at DFCI. It's rewarding to be a part of that.

#### What is the biggest challenge in your role?

Reminding staff (and myself) that even under the most stressful times, there are human beings attached to that blood sample we are working on, and they are relying on us to do the best we can.

#### How does your role contribute to the mission of Dana-Farber?

We welcome people asking for our help to provide testing for various research-driven protocols and are proud to be a part of looking for improvements in treatments for cancer. Our everyday work ethic strives to keep compassionate care as our main focus.

#### What do you do for fun in your spare time?

When I leave Dana-Farber, I enjoy being outside and away from the desk and microscopes. We own three horses. My daughter rides and works in the equestrian field. I help take care of the horses. Although it is manual labor, I enjoy it because it is opposite from what I do all day. Horses are amazing creatures; they have very soulful eyes and a stillness about them that is calming. It helps keep me grounded and able to keep the pace of my job. [NF](#)



## Dancing for a cure

As the familiar music from "The Nutcracker" sounded, young dancers pirouetted, a whirling team of tutus. The holiday performance – to benefit breast and ovarian cancer research – was held Dec. 11 on Yawkey 1 and at the Jimmy Fund Clinic, part of the Friends of Dana-Farber's partnership with Dancing for a Cure. The organization was founded in 2006 by Susan Mendoza Friedman, in honor of a friend who was diagnosed with stage III ovarian cancer.

Friedman, of the Dance Designs dance studio in Hyannis, Mass., channels her "dance energy" to raise money to find a cure for breast and ovarian cancer. The performance was open to patients, families, and staff. [NF](#)

### Muscle loss, continued from page 1

as weightlifting, causes a rise in the protein, which in turn triggers biochemical changes that make muscles larger and more powerful, say the researchers.

The protein is an isoform, or slight variant, of PGC-1 alpha, an important regulator of body metabolism. In contrast to the newly found variant, PGC-1 alpha is elevated in muscles following exercise such as long-distance running, which increases muscular endurance rather than making muscles bigger. "It's pretty amazing that two proteins made by a single gene regulate the effects of both types of exercise," says Spiegelman.

The researchers found that the new protein controls the activity of two molecular pathways involved in muscle growth. Increased levels of PGC-1 alpha-4 following weight-bearing exercise boost activity of a protein called IGF1 (insulin-like growth factor 1), which facilitates muscle growth. In addition, increased PGC-1 alpha-4 suppresses another protein, myostatin, which normally restricts muscle growth. In effect, PGC-1 alpha-4 presses the accelerator and removes the brake to enable exercised muscles to gain mass and strength.

"All of our muscles have both positive and negative influences on growth," Spiegelman explains.

Ruas, the first author, is now on the faculty at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. Other authors are from Dana-Farber, Harvard Medical School, the University of Colorado, the University of Virginia, and the Mayo Clinic. [RS](#)

### South Korea, continued from page 1

building its own cancer center in 2008. The two institutions have maintained a relationship ever since, working together to develop a nursing fellowship program through which Asan nurses come to DFCI for training in research and clinical care.

"They are very proud of their patient-centered care, and their nurses have developed some impressive electronic tools patients can use to track their symptoms and pain management," says Elperin.

"Patient volume, patient flow, and staffing are big concerns for them, as for us," adds Reid Ponte, senior vice president of Patient Care Services and chief nurse. "They would really love to develop a research nursing role like

our nurse practitioners, but they don't have the educational program in place yet to train NPs. We hope we're helping them in this area."

Among the nurses Elperin and Reid Ponte met with at Asan were 20 who completed the fellowship program at Dana-Farber during the past several years – including four who returned from a month at DFCI on the same day Elperin and Reid Ponte arrived in Asia. "It was fun to see them in their home environment," says Elperin.

For Reid Ponte, an additional perk of the trip was seeing her son, Matthew, a private in the Army infantry stationed at Camp Hovey, north of Seoul. "He won't be home for another year, so it was great to see him." [SW](#)